

opportunities when they present themselves and understand when the conditions are right for action.

USE OF THE RESERVE IN COMBAT

The reserve is an important tool for exploiting success. The reserve is a part of the commander's combat power initially withheld from action in order to influence future action.¹³ The reason to create and maintain a reserve is to provide flexibility to deal with the uncertainty, chance, and disorder of war. The reserve is thus a valuable tool for maintaining adaptability. In general, the more uncertain the situation, the larger should be the reserve. Napoleon once said that "War is composed of nothing but accidents, and . . . a general should never lose sight of everything to enable him to profit from [those] accidents."¹⁴ These accidents take the form of opportunities and crises. The reserve is a key tactical tool for dealing with both.

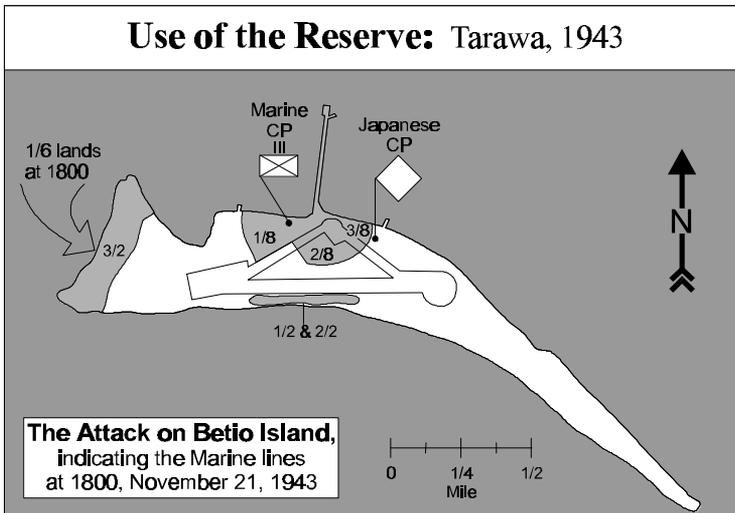
The commander should have a purpose in mind for the reserve's employment and design it to fulfill that purpose. To truly exploit success may warrant assignment of the commander's best subordinate unit or a preponderance of combat power or mobility assets to the reserve. Those commanders who properly organize, task, and equip their reserves are usually the ones with the capability to finish the enemy when the opportunity arises.

Winston Churchill recognized the value of a reserve when he wrote: “It is in the use and withholding of their reserves that the great Commanders have generally excelled. After all, when once the last reserve has been thrown in, the Commander’s part is played The event must be left to pluck and to the fighting troops.”¹⁵

A strong reserve is also a way to retain the initiative. If an advance slows, the reserve can increase the momentum. If an advance picks up speed, the commitment of the reserve can create a rout. We may use the reserve to expand or exploit gaps or penetrations. We may commit the reserve to attack in a different direction, thus exploiting opportunities for success instead of reinforcing failure. Without a strong reserve, even the most promising opportunities can be lost.

A classic example of the use of the reserve is the battle for Tarawa. With the 2d and 8th Marine Regiments held up on the assault beaches, General Julian Smith decided to land the 6th Marine Regiment, the division reserve, to break the stalemate. The 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, which was task-organized as part of the division reserve, landed on the western end of the island, passed through 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, and from the flank conducted a swift and violent assault of the Japanese fortifications across the island. Within 48 hours, the Japanese forces were annihilated and the island secured. General Smith’s use of his reserve to exploit success and finish the enemy was the key to victory at Tarawa.¹⁶ (See figure.)

Sometimes we must employ the reserve to deal with some crisis, rendering it temporarily unavailable for commitment elsewhere. In such instances, a reserve should be reconstituted as rapidly as possible. We should look for the opportunity to employ the reserve to reinforce success. However we may employ the reserve, we should always think of it as the tool for clinching the victory. In this respect, Marshal Foch wrote that “the reserve is a *club*, prepared, organized, reserved, carefully maintained with a view to carrying out the one act of battle



from which a result is expected—the decisive attack.”¹⁷ It is generally through offensive action, even in the defense, that we achieve decisive results. Since the reserve represents our bid to achieve a favorable decision or to prevent an unfavorable one, it often becomes the main effort once committed and should be supported by all the other elements of the force.

Along with the tangible assets used as a reserve, the prudent commander must also be aware of, and plan for, the intangible factors that impact on combat power and its sustainment. Intangible factors include fatigue, leadership quality, proficiency, morale, teamwork, and equipment maintenance. We build reserves also by reserving aviation sortie rates or numbers, withholding unique or low-density munitions, or holding critical supplies such as fuel or petroleum, oils, and lubricants for a specific goal. We consider these intangible factors when creating and tasking the reserve, as we do in all assignments of tasks.

These concepts apply not only to units initially designated as the reserve but also to any unit, since any unit can be shifted or recommitted as the reserve. Thus a commander must always be mentally prepared to redesignate roles of units and to create and use reserves as the situation requires.¹⁸